**Role Play for English Language Learners**

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Seminar in Apply Theory Research 1

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**Introduction**

The number of students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) continues to increase across the country, with the most impact in California, New York, and Texas. Between 1990 and 1995, the number of kindergarten through 12th grade ELLs nationwide increased by approximately 47% (Macias & Kelly, 1996). In California, approximately 25% of the public-school population is ELLs, also referred to as limited English proficient (LEP). Furthermore, these students are not just arriving in the elementary school years. According to the California Department of Education, 17% of all California secondary school students are identified as LEPs (McCall, 2000). This is why role play is essential to learning in America when the percentage of ELL’s is growing increasingly. These kids are our future so we must find ways to give them the best education possible; by first helping, they become fluent in English.

**Statement of Problem**

The problem is that English language learners are introduced to new English words, however, they are not using those words correctly through conversation. This is an issue when ELL’s are communicating with their peers that are proficient in English and this causes a lack of understanding. The school that I chose to complete my field observation requirements is Public School D. There are many ELL’s in this school that are not really progressing orally as they should. It’s hard to learn classroom material when you’re still trying to learn English. That’s why most English language learners (ELLs) struggle to keep up for a while. But, when your student doesn’t progress the way they should, or has problems keeping up with their peers, they may not be getting the help they need. If a child is struggling more than most, they may face an even bigger obstacle. The teacher and school may not properly identify what’s causing the student difficulty. They may think it’s a lack of English language skills when it’s really learning and attention issues. Or, just as often, they make the opposite mistake. They may think the student has learning and attention issues when they just don’t have English language skills. Because of these types of errors, many ELLs get the wrong kind of help, delayed help or no help at all. Including role-play inside the classroom could prevent boredom and enhance ELL’s communication through verbal communication.  
  
**Literature Review**

**Role Play for English Language Learners**

Role play is known to be beneficial for English Language Learners. “Role play consists of Readers' use of voices to bring characters to life; Act of reading a script effectively; Fluency goals,” (Martinez, et al, 1998). Not only are Students from different backgrounds having difficulty with the English language, but some students that were born right here in America are also. Not to mention, "in a study of 18,528 middle school students attending 22 schools in a large U.S. urban school district, for example, Ardasheva, Tretter, and Kinny ([2012](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ez-proxy.brooklyn.cuny.edu:2048/doi/10.1002/tesq.72/full#tesq72-bib-0004)) found that former ELLs significantly outperformed not only current ELLs, but also native-English-speaking students, on the state-mandated reading achievement test (78% of former ELLs were proficient readers as compared to 62% and 23% of native-English-speaking and current ELLs, respectively," (Ardasheva, & Tretter, pg 323-351, 2013).This shouldn't be so, however, this can happen with first language English learners who have lack of help with school work at home, which can give kids a negative outlook on school and then they begin to not take their education as serious. This is why “the use of multicultural literature and the Readers' Theater educational strategy to promote reading for African American elementary school students is just as beneficial. “Readers' Theater can help assist students with dramatizing books through classroom performances,” (Weisenburger, 2009). This will help to promote and engaged reading and improve reader self-confidence, which is also a great assessment, that builds students confidence. Moreover, when teachers study their students’ language when teaching through role-play, it “enables teachers to render ESL multicultural instructional objectives more significant and classroom activities more meaningful and engaging. It provides an overview of oral and literacy activities as well as literacy scaffolds and assessment tools developed in conjunction with multicultural role-play units,” (Gordon, 2012). The whole purpose of role play is for students to understand the language and by repeating the language it will be embedded in their heads so when they have to talk about certain topics inside the classroom, they know how to speak correctly. As the author said, "repeated oral readings are two of the best ways to target fluency instruction,” (Samuels, 1979). Adding on, “Readers Theatre was selected as an authentic instructional approach to assisted and repeated readings as a consequence of a professional development session," (Chase & Rasinski, 2009). This practice does take time but with the teacher’s assistance and practice with many literatures, students have an opportunity to become better English Speakers.

There are many educators who feel that the learning process is more important than the teaching of the language. I disagree, because learning the language will make the learning process a little smoother because the focus will not be on the struggle of the language too if the language is already understood. For example, in India, The emphasis is only given on the [linguistic competence](http://go.galegroup.com.ez-proxy.brooklyn.cuny.edu:2048/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CA415359457&v=2.1&u=cuny_broo39667&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&authCount=1) of the language learner not on the development of the communicative ability of the learner. The absence of a suitable environment for using the language, the failure to use appropriate teaching aids and techniques along with the ignorance of latest developments in [English](http://go.galegroup.com.ez-proxy.brooklyn.cuny.edu:2048/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CA415359457&v=2.1&u=cuny_broo39667&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&authCount=1) Language teaching among [teachers](http://go.galegroup.com.ez-proxy.brooklyn.cuny.edu:2048/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CA415359457&v=2.1&u=cuny_broo39667&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&authCount=1) aggravate the situation of English language teaching and learning in India. Role-play is a valuable teaching and training tool where learners take on different roles, assuming a profile of a character or personality, and interact and participate in diverse and complex learning settings. Furthermore, The English language teacher should focus on different factors for ELL’s success such as: the topic chosen should be real and relevant to the situation; the teacher's role as a facilitator, participant and spectator; need in giving appropriate feedback; correcting the errors; developing linguistic competence and self-confident. focusing on the key benefits of role-play, how it works in a language classroom, steps in constructing a role-play, preparing [students](http://go.galegroup.com.ez-proxy.brooklyn.cuny.edu:2048/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CA415359457&v=2.1&u=cuny_broo39667&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&authCount=1) for role-play and the teacher's role in role-play is all important (Ashok, 2016). Looking at it from this perspective, I totally agree, that if there’s not a community that just focus on English, it’s definitely harder for learners to grasp the language because not much practicing is going on. As it is known, living in another country, you can learn their language faster because many people are using the language and then practicing is inevitable. This is why people prefer to come to America to learn English because they know they will not be distracted with other languages as much or if any.

In Japan, they are adamant about student using less of their language to learn English. As the article stated, English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in Japan should be provided with more opportunities to engage with the [English language](http://go.galegroup.com.ez-proxy.brooklyn.cuny.edu:2048/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CA317588386&v=2.1&u=cuny_broo39667&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w) outside the classroom. Free voluntary reading, proposed by Krashen (2011) and based on his comprehension hypothesis, makes this possible. The reading material provided by children's literature is appropriate for EFL learners, because works of diverse language levels and genres are readily available. Additionally, EFL learners can read for their own pleasure while unconsciously improving their English language abilities (Takenaga, 2012). In addition, the importance of students being able to communicate more in English so that they can enhance their English language skills. This is called Language shift, which is the process whereby one language becomes increasingly lesser used in place of the use of another language.

**Pros**

It is evident that children need language to play in English, so, the play spiral begins with directed, adult-led play, where children are exposed to the language they require to participate in an activity,” (Mourão, S. 2014). That is why role-play is great for boosting language usage. The reason role-play is a good way to enhance communication is because "the formation of such teams is to help introverts seek motivation from the extroverts, sociable students to lead the team, and all the members get the opportunity to interact with members of the opposite gender in a team," (Chaitanya, E. Krishna, & Ramana, K. Venkata. 2013). Also, there will be emphasis on developing ELLs' strategic competence; that is, their ability to overcome communication challenges stemming from limited second language proficiency (see, e.g., Oxford, [1990](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ez-proxy.brooklyn.cuny.edu:2048/doi/10.1002/tesj.32/full#tesj32-bib-0028)), (Gordon, T. 2012). This is not an easy process, however, students will be giving time to take up their own roles and practice again for several times. "Ample rehearsal time makes the difference for struggling readers in any kind of performance," (Worthy, J., & Prater, K. 2002). In addition, it is great for "struggling readers to have ample opportunities for real reading and to experience some success," (Rinehart, S. D. 1999). This will even help them gain confidence to perform role play without any assistance. They will also practice as a group before they take up the role play before the class. "Practice helps students to cope with the dialogues, situation, and characters in the play and to empathize with the character which in turn helps them to undertake role play in the best manner possible. Thus, the practice sessions have been conducted fruitfully and it led to the final phase of performing the role play before the class," (Chaitanya et al, 2013). Teachers should know that group work is very important, whether they know or not, “Such efforts send a signal to students that communication and teamwork are important parts of the profession," (Bell, S. K., Wideroff, M., & Gaufberg, L. 2010) this is why most students are cooperative and take this experience as an intrinsic part of learning.

The best way to target the effectiveness of role-play is through the readers’ theatre. This consist of, “repeated oral readings, which is one of the best ways to target fluency instruction,” (Samuels, 1979). Just to add on, "Readers Theatre was selected as an authentic instructional approach to assisted and repeated readings as a consequence of a professional development session presented by the second author," (Chase, Y., & Rasinski, 2009).  Furthermore, "Readers' Theater helps struggling readers gain confidence because they are not required to read the whole script by themselves, since parts are divided among the group. And students like it because they get to interact with their peers. For success with Readers' Theater, teachers should use texts for performance that are not above the readers' instructional levels. They should have straightforward plots that present characters working through dilemmas," (Weisenburger, S. 2009), this will be more beneficial to EL Learners.

Also, doing a fun lesson or activity, will motivate the students to want to learn more. This is why role-play is great because students are given an opportunity to express themselves not only orally, but, physically, because they, "read directly from a script, using intonation, facial expressions, and gestures to create characters that transport the audience into the story. Children are natural performers, and they love using their imaginations, so RT makes reading practice an adventure instead of a chore," (Stewart, M. 2010).

**Cons**

English language teachers should take into account the social-psychological situation of the students they teach. There may be a few students that suffer from traumatic stress. This is why, "engaging students in choral practice, using correction techniques that do not expose learners to embarrassment, and having students participate in small-group work as a way of avoiding situations in which the whole class focuses attention on one learner," (Medley, 2012) is a great way for educators to conduct their classroom. Moreover, as an educator, we need to know what ELL's are going through while they are trying to learn another language and teachers need to learn how to be more sensitive and understanding towards these issues. Without taking into account this necessary information and learning to understand your students that are from other language backgrounds, it will be hard for educators to reach such students academically and linguistically.

**Strategies**

What are some strategies teachers can use for role play? Why is role play essential for English Language Learners? What can role play offer?

There are a lot of instructional strategies that will help assist teachers with using role play inside their classroom. For example, “Readers' Theater lends itself to the development of metacognition in students. Metacognition is the knowledge and control individuals have over their own thinking and learning activities,” (Kelleher, 1997). When students are, role playing, they will start to see and understand through the dialog, how communicate really works in English. While role playing, without knowing, ELL’s are already controlling their thinking by practicing to understand and comprehend the use of accurate English language usage through role play.

Also, practicing memorization is an excellent way to keep in mind the techniques on how language is use, so when students are speaking in English they start to correct themselves because through practice they began to know what they want and should say, basically, correct way to speak. In addition, “students can benefit from memorizing scripts for role play,” (Jutras, 2008). The effects of reader’s theatre will, “improve fluency and overall reading achievement among primary grade students,” (Chase & Rasinski, 2009).

Another strategy, is the “Chinese strategy, which shows both satellite- and verb-framed properties (Beavers, Levin, & Tham, [2010](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ez-proxy.brooklyn.cuny.edu:2048/doi/10.1111/modl.12330/abstract#modl12330-bib-0003); Slobin, [2004](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ez-proxy.brooklyn.cuny.edu:2048/doi/10.1111/modl.12330/abstract#modl12330-bib-0062)), a fact that offers the opportunity to explore the typological influence of learners’ dominant language because they can choose either option to describe the same motion events and be grammatically correct. This study comprehensively examined the impact of factors including the dominant language's thinking for speaking (TFS) (Slobin, [1987](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ez-proxy.brooklyn.cuny.edu:2048/doi/10.1111/modl.12330/abstract#modl12330-bib-0058), [1996](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ez-proxy.brooklyn.cuny.edu:2048/doi/10.1111/modl.12330/abstract#modl12330-bib-0059), [2003](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ez-proxy.brooklyn.cuny.edu:2048/doi/10.1111/modl.12330/abstract#modl12330-bib-0061)), as well as proficiency and degree of socialization with the target language. It examined oral narratives produced by 80 learners of Chinese representing two proficiency levels (low vs. high) and two linguistic backgrounds (heritage language vs. foreign language), as compared to two baseline groups of 40 Chinese native speakers (NSs) and 40 English NSs. Analysis of the motion verbs and motion constructions showed a limited role of the dominant TFS. While the more proficient learners were more capable of producing task-relevant motion expressions regardless of their language background, only advanced heritage learners demonstrated target-like TFS. Comparison of heritage and foreign language learners at the same proficiency level suggests that degree of language socialization plays a crucial role in facilitating development of TFS in the target language,” (Wu, 2016). When practicing the English language orally, students become better English speakers gradually.

“This non experimental study explored the relationships among individual differences, contextual variables, and reading achievement of English language learners (s) in one large urban school district in the United States. The sample comprised 840 students in Grades 3–8 and 10 nested within 37 schools. Hierarchical linear modeling results indicate that English proficiency, metacognitive strategies, and native language literacy, and school‐quality indicators— four variables potentially under the control of the educational system—positively contributed to student reading achievement. The final model explained 36% of the within‐school and 79% of the between‐school variance in reading achievement. Controlling for other variables, s with disadvantaged educational backgrounds appeared to perform on par with their more educationally advantaged counterparts. These results suggest that schools may play a greater role in supporting s with disadvantaged educational backgrounds,” (Ardasheva, 2013). Educators need to understand the differences between their students so that they know what to expect when they are given so many students to teach every school year. Also, how well you know English, determines your progress academically.

Drawing on experience and the emerging results of a research project, this article examines the role of play, in particular child-initiated play, when learning languages in pre-primary settings. It begins by characterizing play and highlights the importance of a balanced relationship between adult-led and child-initiated play activities. It proposes that English learning areas might facilitate child-initiated play in the target language, and analyses the relationship between adult-led and child-initiated play, consequently outlining a possible format and its components: structure, role, and script. Analysis of a teacher-led activity with a group of children demonstrates how this format supports children in later child-initiated play. Excerpts from observations of children in English learning areas exemplify how teacher-led instruction can enable child-initiated play. The article concludes with a discussion around the implications for practice in pre-primary EFL settings (Mourao, 2014). This is why role play is important to support children that are English Language learners.

Connectives (e.g., although, meanwhile) carry abstract meanings and often signal key relationships between text ideas. This study explored whether understanding of connectives represents a unique domain of vocabulary knowledge that provides special leverage for reading comprehension, and whether the contribution of knowledge of connectives to reading comprehension differs for students from distinct language backgrounds. Understanding of connectives, word reading efficiency and breadth of vocabulary knowledge of 75 English language learners (ELLs) and 75 English‐only (EO) fifth graders were assessed. Hierarchical multiple regression techniques revealed that understanding of connectives explained a sizeable and significant portion of unique variance in comprehension beyond that explained by breadth of vocabulary knowledge when controlling for word reading efficiency. The magnitude of this relationship was larger for EO students than for ELLs. Findings indicate that connectives play an important role in comprehension, but that the strength of their influence varies by readers’ linguistic background (Crosson & Lesaux, 2013). Students have a more understanding of what they are reading by connecting to the story. That's why teachers should be mindful of who their students are as a person, to choose good material for them to read as well as practice of the English language.

**Theorist**

Many Theorist believe that play is important when learning.  Jean-Jacques Rousseau's conception of humane communication and his proposal for teaching it have implications for our understanding of the role of listening in education. She develops this argument through a close reading of Rousseau's most substantial work on education, "Emile: Or, On Education". Laverty elucidates Rousseau's philosophy of communication, beginning with his taxonomy of the three voices--articulate, melodic, and accentuated--illustrating the ways in which they both enhance and obfuscate understanding. Next, Laverty provides an account of Rousseau's philosophical psychology, with specific reference to "amour-propre" and "amour de soi". Listening plays a central role in Rousseau's philosophy of communication, Laverty maintains, because it is in the act of listening that humans fulfill, or fail to fulfill, the imperative that we seek to understand others (Averty & Megan, 2011).  Although during role play, students are indulging in dialog and repeating lines to memorize and deliver, they are also listening to their peers act out their roles too. This is no difference than English language learners using websites that helps them enhance

their English Language skills. Actually, this is more fun, when listening and working with peers depending on the class environment, which the teacher has set to allow all learners equality. Students knowing, they are treated equally the same no matter what level they are at academically, help aide them to communicate in class and feel comfortable doing so.

Vygotsky’s theory of cognitive mediation has been the concept of the zone of proximal development. According to Vygotsky, the zone that covers an individual’s current developmental level stretches from the level at which the child has already completely mastered lower level skills and knowledge to the level at the upper limit of the individual’s capacity, where the child can use a skill or know something only in the best of circumstances. Teachers will access children with scripts for role-play that consist of their own level and a little above their level so that they can access what they know and increase their communication skills a little more. Teachers should not go below their students’ level because the lower level of the zone is defined by Vygotsky as the actual level of development. Everything below this level has already been mastered by prior knowledge so there is no need to stay on that level because it will stop the growth of learners. Everything above this level is as yet unachievable by the person and beyond his or her limits (the future) and this should be implemented in the role-play because between these two levels is in the zone and is potentially achievable by the person (the present). “This area is called the zone of proximal development because this range covers the problems, challenges, and tasks that are proximal, or next to, the person’s last fully developed level of abilities,” (*Lev Vygotsky. 2005)* This is how students learn and grow, by achieving one level then moving on to the next. They cannot learn by jumping from one level to the other if they have not fully grasped the previous level that prepares them for the next.

Also, Vygotsky's central insights regarding the use of speech is that "the process of articulating thought into speech-the expressive use-may generate meaning. In other words, through the act of moving inchoate thinking into a public, articulated form, the thinking itself may undergo change," (Smagorinsky, P., Hansen, M., & Fink, L. 2013). It is great that role-play allow students to express themselves because expression give deeper meaning and can increase language and communication when the words and body are being use together.

**Research Hypothesis**

Students will role play every Friday for 90 minutes, for a 1-month duration. This will motivate 25 third grade English Language Learners to become more confident by participating more in class conversations and most importantly enhance their English Language skills. Also, test the student’s participation in read aloud.

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**Appendix A: Principal Consent Form**

Dear Principal,

My name is Latoya. Dawson. I am a student attending Brooklyn College, who is enrolled in an Action Research class.  I am completing an Action Research project and I would appreciate your support in completing it.  The project is focused on helping English Language Learners become more efficient in English through Role Play. By increasing ELL'S oral communication. The project requires the assistance of both the teacher and the students.   All the data from the school will be undisclosed for the security of all the participants and the school administration.

Surveys will be given before and after the research to view the effectiveness of role play.  This information will be useful for students that are just learning English or are having difficulty learning the English language. The focus of the role play is to enhance ELL's oral communication inside the classroom, during read aloud and group and whole class participation.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at [LDawson29@gmail.com](mailto:LDawson29@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

Latoya Dawson

Today’s date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ allow Latoya Dawson an Early Action Research project on the education topic stated.

**Appendix B: Instructor Consent Form**

Dear Instructor,

My name is Latoya Dawson.  I am a student attending Brooklyn College, who is enrolled in an Action Research class.  I am completing an Action Research project and I would appreciate your support in completing it.  The project is focused on helping English Language Learners become more efficient in English through Role Play. By increasing ELL'S oral communication. The project requires the assistance of both the teacher and the students.   All the data from the school will be undisclosed for the security of all the participants and the school.

Surveys will be given before and after the research to view the effectiveness of role play. This information will be useful for students that are just learning English or are having difficulty learning the English language. The focus of the role play is to enhance ELL's oral communication inside the classroom, during read aloud and group and whole class participation.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at [LDawson29@gmail.com](mailto:LDawson29@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

Latoya Dawson

Today’s date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ allow Latoya Dawson an Early Action Research project on the education topic stated.

**Appendix C: Parent/Guardian Consent Form.**

Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Latoya Dawson.  I am a student attending Brooklyn College, who is enrolled in an Action Research class.  I am completing an Action Research project and I would appreciate your support in completing it.  The project is focused on helping English Language Learners become more efficient in English through Role Play. By increasing ELL'S oral communication. The project requires the assistance of both the teacher and the students. All the data from the school will be undisclosed for the security of your child and the school.

Surveys will be given before and after the research to view the effectiveness of the role play. The focus of the role play is to enhance ELL's oral communication inside the classroom, during read aloud and group and whole class participation.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [LDawson29@gmail.com](mailto:LDawson29@gmail.com).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | I give permission for my child, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, to participate in this study conducted by Latoya Dawson. |
|  | I do not give permission for my child, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, to participate in this study conducted by Latoya Dawson. |